

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

An electronic mail system and method enables the originator of a message sent by electronic mail to select a date, time, or event at which the message and all incarnations of the message to self-destruct, regardless of the number and types of computers or software systems that may have interacted with the message. The system and message also permits the originator to include processing and handling limitations. The necessary control over the message is achieved by encrypting the message and enabling viewing only through a viewer applet arranged to facilitate destruction of the message upon the occurrence of the selected expiration time, date, or event, and to implement the handling and processing limitations. A central server can be used to exercise additional control over the message by serving as a proxy destination, and by streaming the encrypted message to the viewer applet. The viewer applet can be transmitted to new recipients with the message so that the system and method can direct mail to any electronic mail user.

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